

Objective: to examine the impact of cyber/nuclear technology on U.S. foreign policy.

1 Key terms

- liberation vs. repression technology
- targeted vs. untargeted repression
- deterrence
- nuclear latency

2 Key readings

- H.R.C., “Remarks on Internet Freedom,” (2010)
- Gohdes, “Repression technology” (2020)
- Waltz, “More may be better” (2003)
- Mattiacci et al., “Atomic ambiguity” (Forthcoming)

3 Key ideas

Question: What are two prominent viewpoints regarding effects of cyberspace on contemporary IR?

Answer: (1) Cyber liberation: digital connectivity allows repressed populations to overcome preference falsification, increases audience costs for repressive actions by governments, legitimizes non-state actors, and facilitates documentation of human rights violations. (2) Cyber repression: As Gohdes argues, internet censorship and surveillance drive violent repression. Repressive governments also use social media for strategic distraction, dynamic censorship, and targeting influential dissidents.

Question: How does government control of the internet affect forms of repression?

Answer: Gohdes argues that digital surveillance is positively associated with targeted repression, especially in areas with weak government control, while censorship is positively associated with untargeted repression.

Question: What are the requirements of nuclear deterrence?

Answer: (1) second-strike capabilities, (2) deployment of nuclear forces precludes preemption, (3) reliable command and control

Question: What are arguments in favor of and against nuclear proliferation?

Answer: Waltz makes a 3-step argument that “more may be better”: (1) IR is a “self-help” system, (2) the threat of MAD will deter nuclear and conventional wars, (3) deterrence theory applies to small states too. Sagan argues that “more will be worse” because it’s unlikely that the assumption of reliable command and control will be met due to pathologies of professional military organizations. Other concerns include irrational civilian leaders or terrorist acquisition of fissile material.

Question: Why do some states dismantle or halt their nuclear programs but retain nuclear latency?

Answer: As a state approaches nuclear weapons acquisition, it attracts international pressure and scrutiny. But if the state stops short of a nuclear capacity and instead retains nuclear latency, it avoids such scrutiny yet preserves the ability to keep adversaries “on notice” (Mattiacci and Jones 2016).

Question: What does nuclear latency buy states in terms of cooperation?

Answer: According to Mattiacci et al., this depends on the type of nuclear latency. Overt, lower level latency inspires more cooperation, while covert, lower/higher level latency leads to less cooperation.